

Skin Deep by pterawaters

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Alternate Universe - Tattoo Parlor, Background Relationships, F/F, LGBTQ Themes, background stonathan

Language: English

Characters: Jonathan Byers, Nancy Wheeler, Robin Buckley, Steve Harrington

Relationships: Robin Buckley/Nancy Wheeler

Status: Completed

Published: 2021-05-23

Updated: 2021-05-23

Packaged: 2022-03-31 22:14:17

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 3,672

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Nancy told herself not to develop a crush on another customer, but when Robin came in with an intriguing design for her first tattoo, all bets were off.

Skin Deep

Author's Note:

I wrote this to cross off the "Tattoo Shop" AU square on my Across the Universe bingo card.

This story was also written for "Mix-it-up May." I haven't written much wlw, so I figured this was a great opportunity to write some Ronance.

Thanks to [wolfish_willow](#) for beta reading!

I hope you enjoy the story!

I do not give my permission for any of my works to be reuploaded anywhere without my prior knowledge and consent.

"How's my schedule looking for this afternoon?" Nancy asked, looking over Jonathan's shoulder at the appointment book he kept for Skin Deep. She still wasn't entirely fond of the fact that her best friend and business partner, Steve, had hired his boyfriend to help run the shop. Nancy would've rather hired someone who could actually step in and help with the tattoos when things got busy. Of course, Jonathan had other skills, and Nancy couldn't help but be fond of him. He was especially adept at keeping Steve happy, which counted for a lot in Nancy's book.

Pointing at the day's schedule, Jonathan told her, "You've got Jack coming in later this afternoon for a quick touch-up on his roses. And in just a few minutes here you've got a new customer. She asked to be called Robin B."

"Any sketches or anything I should know?" Nancy tapped her black-painted nails on the top surface of the display case. While her hands were free of any marks, she had sleeves of tattoos up both arms. Steve had done the majority of the work, just as Nancy had done most of Steve's tattoos. All of Nancy's tattoos were placed such that she could hide them under normal, if rather conservative clothes. Her

mother still didn't know what she did for a living, even though Nancy had been licensed for almost five years. The truth would probably send her to an early grave.

Along with just about every other true facet of Nancy's life.

Jonathan shook his head. "No. She said she wants something simple. She's going to bring in the design."

Frowning, Nancy asked, "Did you tell—"

"I told her," Jonathan reassured, "that you might not be able to do it today if it's too complex."

Nancy sighed with relief. "Okay. Good. I just don't want to disappoint."

"You couldn't disappoint if you tried."

Nancy laughed. "Don't say too much of that shit. Your boyfriend will get jealous."

"You guys running off without me again?" Steve asked as he escorted his client to the door.

"Oh, my god," Nancy said with a laugh. "Are you still mad about lunch yesterday?"

Pouting, Steve said, "You didn't invite me to taco Tuesday!"

Nancy laughed again and told him, "I thought you and I came to the conclusion that tacos are very much *not* your thing when we were dating."

Steve's face went blank, then his brows knitted together with confusion. Jonathan laughed, pulling Steve closer and kissing his cheek. Nancy smiled. She was happy for them, of course. It just felt a little unfair that they had each other, and Nancy had... no one. In the eight years since she and Steve had both decided they were gay and should probably break up, Nancy'd had a couple of relationships, but nothing that had stuck for longer than a month or two. Steve and Jonathan were going on four years together, and Nancy hoped she

had a girlfriend by the time they got their shit together and one or the other proposed.

Nancy couldn't stand the thought of going to their wedding without a date. It seemed too... pathetic, even if it was more likely than not going to happen.

The bell above the door rang as it opened, revealing a young woman who entered the shop. She had dirty blonde hair, a black top, black shorts over fishnets, and a black choker around her neck. Her garb wasn't at all unusual, being typical of most of Skin Deep's clientele. Nancy herself preferred dark-colored clothes, as long as she wasn't going to see her mother that day.

The girl approached the counter, addressing Jonathan when she said, "Excuse me? I have an appointment?"

"Robin B?" Jonathan asked her, shoving Steve a little when he looked over Jonathan's shoulder at the appointment book.

The girl nodded. "That's me."

"Then you're with me, sweetheart," Nancy said with a smile. She found terms of endearment made most people more comfortable with her, and comfort made the whole process a lot easier, on both sides of the needle. "I'm Nancy. Let's go chat about what it is you want."

Nancy led the way back to her table. She sat on her rolling stool next to it and patted the table. "Hop on up, here, Robin. Tell me what I can do for you today."

Before she sat down, Robin took a piece of paper out of her purse and unfolded it, handing it to Nancy before she hopped up onto the table. The wary look on her face made Nancy think she was nervous about Nancy's reaction to whatever was on the paper.

Turning it right side up, Nancy read the paper. In cursive script it said, "I won't go down in history, but I will go down on your sister." A surprised chuckle escaped Nancy's throat when she got the joke.

She gave Robin a comforting smile and said, "Nice. Where do you want this?"

Pointing to her right side, she said, “On my ribs. So, like, a one-piece would cover it if need be.”

“Oh, I know *all* about that,” Nancy said, gesturing to her forearms, particularly the mermaid holding the lesbian flag. “The Christmas sweaters my grandmother sends cover a lot.”

Robin gave a nervous giggle. “Exactly.”

After settling on a few details and getting the stencil right, Nancy had Robin lay down on the table and pull up her shirt again. When she put a hand on Robin’s side, the girl flinched. Her skin was warm, and Nancy had to fight the urge to slide her fingers across Robin’s skin again, just to see the reaction she’d get. Clearing her throat, Nancy said, “You’re going to have to be as still as possible. Just breathe slowly and try not to move.”

“Easier said than done,” Robin replied with a wry chuckle.

Biting the inside of her lip, because she was a professional, dammit, Nancy got her ink and machine ready. Experience told her the best place to start, so Nancy set her hand nearby where she was about to put her pen and asked, “Ready?”

Robin took a deep breath and let it out slowly before nodding. “Ready.”

Nancy set the tip of her tattoo machine against Robin’s skin and began.

~*~

Nancy had to give Robin a few breaks, even though it was a fairly straightforward tattoo with little complexity. Rib tattoos almost always required more breaks than tattoos she placed in other locations on the body. During her last few letters, Steve came into Nancy’s area of the shop, looking over her shoulder.

After a moment, he snorted. “That’s good. How’d you think of that?”

Though Nancy wanted to kick him out for being a looky-loo and making her client uncomfortable, Robin told him, “It’s something I

said to my high school bully.”

Steve gave a delighted laugh and held his hand out for Robin to high-five, which she did.

“Why are you giving her a high five?” Nancy asked, setting down her machine. “You *were* a high school bully.”

“In my defense,” Steve said, holding up a finger, like that would absolve him of past crimes, “most of that shit was Tommy’s doing. Also, I was deeply, *deeply* repressed.”

“You thought you were straight,” Nancy said with a laugh, dodging Steve’s attempt to give her a friendly smack.

Rolling his eyes, Steve turned his attention to Robin, “I hope you’re very happy with your work. Nancy’s our best artist.” Steve gave Nancy a beatific smile before finally leaving her area.

Nodding in Steve’s direction, Nancy told Robin, “*He’s* my only competition for best artist.” Looking at the work she’d done, and the few lines she had left, she added, “I think you’re really going to like having this one.”

“Yeah,” Robin said, looking up at the ceiling as Nancy picked up her machine. “Can’t really take it back after this.”

Before she set her needle against Robin’s skin again, Nancy asked, “Would you ever actually want to?”

“No,” Robin replied, turning her head and meeting Nancy’s eye. “I’m still sure.”

Nancy gave a short laugh and said, “Good, because we’re almost done.”

“Let’s do it.”

Suppressing a shiver, Nancy got back to work.

Ten minutes later, she was done. “There.” Nodding to the mirror on the wall, Nancy told Robin, “Take a look.”

She gave Robin her hand as she got off the table, just because some people got a little wobbly-legged. Robin was steady and strong, though, her arm warm in Nancy's hand until she had to let go.

Robin stood in front of the mirror and lifted up the side of her shirt. With most customers, this would be the point where Nancy would get a distant view on her work and critique herself. This time, she couldn't do anything but watch Robin's face. Her features started at open-mouthed, high-eyebrow awe, then slowly approached glee as her lips turned up in a wide smile.

Nancy had to clear her throat before she could ask, "Do you like it?"

"I think I kind of love it!" Robin scrunched up her nose when she smiled at Nancy, and it was just about the cutest thing Nancy had ever seen. A sudden ache bloomed in Nancy's chest. She ignored it, busying herself with getting all of her equipment properly sanitized and put away.

Then Robin was looking at her expectantly, so Nancy had to suck it up and just do her goddamn job. She covered the tattoo with a bandage, explained the care instructions, and gave Robin the handouts as they walked to Jonathan's counter. There Nancy filled out the slip they used to calculate the price and handed it to Jonathan.

She wanted to stick around while Robin was still in the building, to spend as much time as possible with her, but that would be creepy, wouldn't it? She settled herself for giving Robin a warm smile and telling her, "I really hope you enjoy it. Goodbye."

"Bye, Nancy."

As Nancy escaped, she tried not to get too worked up over the fact that Robin had used her name. When she got to the break room, Nancy all but ran face-first into Steve.

"What's gotten into you?" he asked, stepping around her with a mug of coffee in each hand.

"Nothing," Nancy insisted. "I'm fine. I don't have a crush on a client."

Absolutely not.”

Steve laughed and leaned in, pressing a smacking kiss on Nancy’s cheek. “Let’s go to that bar tomorrow night. You know, the lesbian one.”

“So I can get wasted and sleep with another girl who will never call me back?”

“Hey, if it’ll get your mind off that chick.” He shrugged.

Nancy narrowed her eyes at him for a moment before saying, “Maybe. I’ll think about it.”

“That’s all I ask.” He sauntered off toward the front of the store.

Nancy worried at her bottom lip and poured herself a mug of coffee before she remembered it would just make her hands too shaky. She poured the coffee back into the carafe and made herself some tea instead. As she drank it, she tried not to think about what it might feel like to run her ungloved fingers across the words on Robin’s side.

~*~

Two and a half weeks later, Nancy woke to the sound of her apartment buzzer ringing. Noting the time, she groaned and rolled out of bed. Stumbling to the intercom, Nancy pressed the button and said, “It’s Sunday! Why are you bothering me before noon on a Sunday?”

“I brought donuts!”

Nancy sighed loudly, but she pressed the button to let Steve into her building. She unlocked her door and took off the chain before stumbling back to the bathroom. When she was done, she found Steve sitting on her kitchen table, happily munching on a donut. “You’ll never guess who Jonathan and I ran into last night!”

“Your ex?”

“Ew, no.” He held the box out toward her. “That girl you tattooed a couple weeks ago. The ‘down in history’ one.”

“Robin?” Nancy asked, before realizing that remembering Robin’s name probably said a lot more about her feelings than she wanted it to.

Steve nodded. “I’m sorry to be the one to break it to you, Nance, but she’s got a girlfriend. Tammy.”

“Ugh, what kind of name is that?” Nancy sat down in her chair and nibbled on her donut. “Tammy. She sounds aggressively blonde.”

“They’ve been together for a year.” Steve pouted and pet Nancy’s hair. “Maybe I can get them to break up.”

Nancy blinked a few times. “What? No, don’t do that!” She took another bite of her donut. “*How* would you do that?”

“Robin and I are friends now. We’ve bonded over techno music and really bad beer.” Steve stuffed the last two bites of donut into his mouth. “And I think you should be friends with her too.”

“Why? So I can watch painfully as she and blonde Tammy get married and have babies?” Nancy scoffed. “No thanks.”

Scoffing, Steve rolled his eyes. “Tammy’s not even blonde.”

“So not the point, Steven.” Nancy sighed. “I’ll get over it. I just have to meet someone new.”

Dejected, Steve sat back in his chair. “If that’s what you want...”

“That’s what I want,” Nancy told him, even though she could still feel the way Robin sighed when Nancy put a hand on her skin. “Someone new. That’s what it’s gotta be.”

~*~

The pounding beat of the music thumped through Nancy’s body as the bartender handed over her drink. She took a sip of it before turning to Jonathan and asking loud enough to be heard over the music, “Are you sure Steve said to meet him here?”

“Yeah,” Jonathan replied, tugging Nancy’s arm so she followed him

to a slightly quieter corner. He held up his phone. "Look. It says he'll be here, at Club Ruby, any minute."

Nancy confirmed that's what the text said. Looking out at the crowd, she said, "Maybe we should have him meet us at some sort of landmark?"

"Or I could meet you right here."

Nancy turned to find Steve behind her. "There you are! Who was it you were gonna bring?"

"Come on," Steve said, taking Nancy's free hand. "I left her by the coat check."

"Her?" Nancy dodged through the crowd in Steve's wake, Jonathan following close behind. "Are you trying to set me up again? I told you —"

"Just as friends, I swear!"

Looking past Steve, Nancy noticed a girl looking around. When she faced them and waved at Steve, Nancy recognized her. "Robin?"

"Hey, Nancy! Hi, Jonathan!" Her grin was so beautiful, it made Nancy's heart ache. "This place is so loud!"

"The music's good, though, right?" Steve asked, his arm around Jonathan's shoulders.

Jonathan let Steve take a sip of his drink as he replied, "Not really."

Nancy laughed. Though Robin was smiling, she didn't seem to get the joke. Leaning closer to her, Nancy said, "Jonathan has very particular taste in music."

"Music snob. Got it!"

Nancy turned to Jonathan to make another joke at his expense, but he and Steve were already standing close together, foreheads touching, swaying to the music. Nancy rolled her eyes. Turning back to Robin, she said, "Let's leave the lovebirds to themselves and go get

you something to drink.”

“Sure! What’s good here?” Robin asked, staying close as Nancy led the way. “I’m not much of an alcohol person.”

“This is a Wild Kiss,” Nancy said, showing Robin the drink. “Not too sweet, but’ll fuck you up in just two glasses.” She offered it to Robin.

Robin took the drink and sipped from the side, rather than wrapping her lips around the thin cocktail straw. She made a pleased noise and said, “Mm, that’s good! I’ll have one of those!”

While they waited at the bar, Nancy couldn’t help but wonder whether the famous Tammy was going to join them eventually. It wasn’t long before she broke down and asked, “Was your girlfriend busy tonight?”

Robin’s face fell and Nancy wished she hadn’t asked.

“Oh, you don’t have to tell m—”

“We broke up,” Robin said, pouting for a moment before the bartender returned with her drink.

“Hey,” Nancy said, giving Robin a smile and nudging Robin’s shoulder with her own. “Let’s get the boys to dance with us. That’ll cheer you up!”

Robin rolled her eyes and laughed before letting Nancy clasp her free hand and pull her back out onto the dance floor. As soon as they reached Steve and Jonathan, Nancy let go, even though she didn’t want to. Steve gave Jonathan a kiss before stepping far enough away from him to talk to Nancy and Robin. “What? You didn’t get anything for me?”

Robin gave him a light smack on the arm. “You were too busy making out to tell us what you wanted.”

“If that’s what you think making out is, it’s no wonder you and Tammy broke up!”

Nancy gasped at Steve. How could he say something like that?

Robin gave a snorting sort of laugh. She actually liked Steve's joke? Either breaking up with her girlfriend of a year wasn't as devastating to Robin as it would be to Nancy, or she was a fan of dark humor. Either way, Nancy couldn't help but be surprised and intrigued.

The song blaring over the speakers faded, a new song fading in to replace it. Recognizing the opening refrain, Nancy grinned. "Oh, I love this song!"

"Me too!" Robin cried, taking Nancy's hand again. "Come on! We have to dance to this one."

Well, Nancy wasn't going to refuse *that* invitation. Not in a million years. She followed Robin out into the crowd. They ended up dancing fairly close together, singing the lyrics at one another and laughing when they got to the part that was too fast to keep up with.

A dozen more songs and another drink later, Nancy was pleasantly buzzed. She left the bathroom and found Robin waiting for her outside. "Hey!"

"Hey," Robin said, tugging at Nancy until she was leaning against the wall next to Robin. Their backs to the wall, their shoulders pressed together, Robin said, "I knew six months ago Tammy and I weren't gonna make it."

"How come?"

Robin sighed and leaned closer, the side of her head against Nancy's. "She only really cares about her career. At first..."

"At first, what?" Nancy watched the way Robin played with the bracelets on her wrist.

Robin gave a chuckle that wasn't much more than a puff of breath. "At first I thought it was exciting, that I was with someone who was really gonna make something of herself, you know?"

Nancy could guess where this was going. "But that changed?"

"See..." Robin seemed to reevaluate what she was going to say, then started again. "See, when a person only cares about one thing, and

that one thing isn't *you*, it sucks."

Tongue loosened by the Wild Kisses she'd drunk, Nancy said, "She's got to be really, really stupid not to want to spend time with you. Or like, messed up. If you were my—"

Robin's lips pressed against Nancy's, cutting off the rest of her sentence. Not that Nancy could remember what she was going to say. The feel of Robin's lips against hers sent tingles up her spine and goosebumps down her skin. Before Nancy could get herself together enough to kiss back, Robin took a sharp breath. She turned away, saying, "Sorry. Sorry, I didn't even ask."

Giggling, Nancy grabbed Robin by the wrist so she wouldn't get away. "So, can *I* kiss *you*, then?"

Robin's head snapped back toward Nancy, her eyes wide with surprise. She nodded a few times and cleared her throat before saying, "Yeah. Yeah, if you want."

Like hell was Nancy letting this opportunity pass her by. She grabbed Robin's face with both hands and pulled her into a tight, hot kiss that a second later also included a lot of tongue. She tasted like the Wild Kisses they'd both been drinking. Making a soft noise against Nancy's lips, Robin's arms wrapped around her, pulling her until there was no space between them. The hot skin of Robin's fingers found their way to the skin of Nancy's waist and her knees all but gave out under her.

Pulling her mouth away from Robin's, breathless as she said against Robin's ear, "Let's ditch the boys. Go to my place? It's not far."

Robin grinned. "Let me get my coat."

~*~

Nancy was just cleaning up over her last client of the day, when a familiar figure showed up next to her table. "It's time," Robin said with a grin, leaning in and giving Nancy a kiss. "This is now the longest relationship I've ever had."

"Me too," Nancy grinned at her girlfriend, kissing her again before finishing her wipe-down of the table. "As long as we don't count

Steve.”

“Steve doesn’t count,” Robin agreed.

“Why don’t I count?” Steve asked from the doorway. “Because it was high school?”

“Yeah,” Nancy told him, helping Robin up onto the table. “And we only slept together, like, twice before realizing we’re both gay.”

Robin repeated, “Doesn’t count,” before sticking her tongue out at Steve, who laughed.

Pulling his rolling stool over to Nancy’s table, Steve asked, “Did you guys decide on what you wanted?”

Robin took a folded paper out of her pocket. After unfolding it, she showed Steve the drawing she’d done the night before. There were two interlocked rings, one with an N in the center, and the other with an R. “Think you can do it the same on both of us?”

“Yeah, I think I can handle it,” he said with a scoff that was more friendly than not. “So Robin’s going first?”

Grinning at Nancy, Robin asked, “If I go first, you’re not gonna chicken out, are you?”

Nancy laughed, folded Robin’s hand in hers, and said, “I’m not going anywhere.”

Author's Note:

Thanks so much for reading! I'd love to hear what you thought in the comments!

If you want to learn more about my fanfic writing, you can find me [on tumblr](#).

If you want to learn more about my original works, you can follow [my author twitter](#).